

Message Text

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QUOTE

S E C R E T TUNIS 0747

SQSCISFNMJVY THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO CAIRO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR TS LY AG MO SS E G US

SUBJECT: FAHMY'S CONCERN RE TUNISIA

REF: STATE 24958, STATE 24957, TUNIS 0043, STATE 024935

1. SUMMARY: TUNISIAN CONCERN WITH LIBYAN/ALGERIAN THREAT HAS GROWN OVER PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS. CURRENT ALGERIAN ANTI-GOT PROPAGANDA RESULTING FROM SAHARA CONTROVERSY SHARPENS CONCERN, PERHAPS ESPECIALLY FOR CHATTI WHOM ALGERIANS BLAME. BUT UNLIKE SOME OTHER GOT OFFICIALS, CHATTI HAS NOT EMPHASIZED CONCERN TO ME. TUNISIA IS RE-
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BUILDING TIES WITH EGHPT AS COUNTERPOISE TO HOSTILE NEIGHBORS,

AND CHATTI UNDERSTANDABLY CONFIDED IN FAHMY IN ORDER CAPITALIZE ON CLOSE U.S.-EGYPTIAN DIALOGUE. HOWEVER, BELIEVE CHATTI WOULD ALSO MAKE SAME POINTS WITH ME IF HE DEEPLY WORRIED. GOT HAS REACTED TO THREAT BY REQUESTING INCREASED ARMS PURCHASES FROM US TO ACHIEVE MODEST DETERRENT CAPABILITY, BUT FOR MIX OF REASONS GOT HAS NOT MADE MAJOR PURCHASES. INTERIOR MINISTER SEES THREAT AS POLITICAL, AND MILITARY. GOT TACTIC RE ALGERIAN PROPAGANDA ATTACKS IS TO TURN OTHER CHEEK. PROPOSED USG INCREASE IN FMS CREDITS IS DIRECT RESPONSE TO GOT CONCERN AND WE HAVE OFFERED SELL AIRCRAFT AND SAM SYSTEMS. SIXTH FLEET CONTINUES SATISFACTORY VISIT SCHEDULE CONTRIBUTING TO BOURGUIBA'S BELIEF IN FLEET AS HIS "SHIELD." DETERRENT VALUE OF QUDHAFI'S POSSIBLE BELIEF IN USG COMMITMENT TO TUNISIA'S DEFENSE MAY HAVE WEAKENED RECENTLY IN WAKE OF USG SETBACKS OVERSEAS. CONTINUED DEMONSTRATION OF USG INTEREST IN TUNISIAN NEEDS PROVIDES PSYCHOLOGICAL REASSURANCE TO GOT REGIME AND HOPEFULLY HAS DETERRENT VALUE WITH REGIME'S ENEMIES. PROBABLE RESUMPTION OF PL-480 SHIPMENT, FRUITFUL JOINT COMMISSION MEETING, AND CONTINUING MODEST AID PROGRAM ARE THEREFORE WELCOME. BASICALLY WE THINK LIBYAN/ALGERIAN THREAT IS NON-MILITARY AND, WHILE GOT HAS REASON TO IMPROVE ITS DETERRENT CAPABILITY, ITS MAIN FOCUS SHOULD REMAIN ON STRENGTHENING CIVILIAN INSTITUTIONS AND CAPACITY TO FRUSTRATE SUBVERSION. END SUMMARY.

2. TUNISIA'S CONCERN WITH CURRENT AND POTENTIAL THREATS FROM BOTH LIBYA AND ALGERIA HAS BEEN GROWING OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF. ALTHOUGH TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN PROCLAIMING PUBLICLY THAT ITS RELATIONS WITH ITS TWO NEIGHBORS CONTINUE TO BE CORDIAL, CERTAIN TUNISIAN OFFICIALS HAVE CONVEYED TO ME CONFIDENTIALLY THEIR APPREHENSION OVER THE IMMEDIATE THREAT TO TUNISIA POSED BY QADHAFI AND THE LONG-TERM HEGEMONIC ASPIRATIONS OF BOUMEDIENE. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, ONE OF THE TUNISIAN OFFICIALS WHO HAS TOUCHED ONLY LIGHTLY ON THIS SUBJECT DURING OUR FREQUENT MEETINGS IS FOMMIN CHATTI. HOWEVER, RECENT VEHEMENT ALGERIAN PRESS ATTACKS AGAINST TUNISIA FLOWING FROM TUNISIAN SUPPORT FOR MOROCCAN POSITION ON SAHARA MAY BE CAUSING CHATTI SPECIAL CONCERN SINCE, AS NEW ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR HAS CONFIDED TO ME, ALGERIANS BLAME CHATTI FOR HAVING

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ALLEGEDLY "DOUBLE-CROSSED THEM" (75 TUNIS 7336). THEY MAY HAVE TOLD HIM AS MUCH.

3. DURING MY MOST RECENT MEETING WITH CHATTI ON JANUARY 20, AFTER HIS RETURN FROM SEEING FAHMY IN CAIRO, CHATTI DID NOT REPEAT NOT EVEN RAISE THE SUBJECT OF THE THREAT. I AM SURE HE WOULD HAVE DONE SO HAD HE BEEN DEEPLY WORRIED. HE HAS TAKEN PRIDE IN WHAT HE CONSIDERS TO BE EXCELLENT RELATION-

SHIP WHICH HE HAS ESTABLISHED WITH YOU, AND FOR THIS REASON HE HAS NOT HESITATED IN THE PAST TO ASK ME TO RELAY MESSAGES TO YOU. ON OTHER HAND, IT DOES NOT SURPRISE ME THAT CHATTI TOOK ADVANTAGE OF MEETING WITH FAHMY TO EXPRESS HIS CONCERNS. TUNISIA, WHICH WARMED UP TO SADAT ONLY SLOWLY BECAUSE OF RESIDUAL ANTAGONISMS TOWARD EGHPT FLOWING FROM NASSER DAYS, IS TURNING INCREASINGLY TOWARD EGYPT AS A COUNTERPOISE TO TUNISIA'S UNCONGENIAL NEIGHBORS. IN THIS CONTEXT, CHATTI COULD BE EXPECTED TO CONFIDE IN THE EGYPTIANS, AND, WHERE U.S. IS INVOLVED, TO SEEK TO CAPILLLIZE ON CLOSE AND CONTINUING U.S.-EGYPTIAN DIALOGUE.

4. MEANWHILE, TUNISIANS ARE REACTING TO LIBYAN-ALGERIAN THREAT TIN A NUMBER OF WAYS. INITIALLY, THEY USED THIS THREAT AS BASIS FOR REQUEST TO US A YEAR AGO FOR MAJOR INCREASE IN ARMS PURCHASES. WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THEY WOULD NEVER BE A MATCH FOR LARGER AND BETTER EQUIPPED LIBYAN AND ALGERIAN FORCES, THEY HAVE FELT THE NEED FOR MORE OF AMILITARY DETERRENT TO DELAY, AT LEAST SOMEWHAT, AN ATTACKING FORCE PENDING ACTION (UNSPECIFIED) BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ON TUNISIA'S BEHALF. AS YET, HOWEVER, THE TUNISIANS HAVE NOT MADE ANY MAJOR NEW MILITARY PURCHASES FOR AT LEAST THREE REASONS: (1) LACK OF FUNDS; (2) DIFFERENCES OF VIEW WITHIN THE TUNISIAN LEADERSHIP AS TO THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ADVISABILITY OF MAJOR MILITARY EXPENDITURES; AND (3) DIFFERENCES OF VIEWS AS TO HOW BEST TO COPE WITH THESE THREATS. MINISTER OF INTERIOR, TAHAR BELKHODJA, TOLD ME TWO WEEKS AGO THAT IN HIS VIEW LIBYAN-ALGERIAN THREAT IS ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL AND SUBVERSIVE IN NATURE, RATHER THAN MILITARY. THEREFORE, HE CONTINUED, GOT MUST CONCENTRATE ITS ENERGIES ON DEVELOPING BETTER INTERNAL SECURITY APPARATUS AND "STRENGTHENING THE SOCIETY." IN THIS CONNECTION, AND DESPITE MY EXPLANATION

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THAT USG CAN NO LONGER PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO POLICE FORCES, HE HAS ASKED THAT WE DO WHAT WE CAN TO ASSIST IN THIS SPHERE. ERMAN GOVERNMENT HAS UNDERTAKEN TO PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN STRENGTHENING BORDER SURVEILLANCE CAPABILITIES, AND GOT SEEMS TO HAVE INCREASED ITS SURVEILLANCE OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION FIGURES ON ASSUMPTION THAT ALGERIANS, IN PARTICULAR, ARE GIVING INCREASED AID AND COMFORT TO TUNISIAN OPPOSITION LEADXRS IN EXILE. GOT REACTION TO CURRENT ALGERIAN ATTACKS OVER TUNISIAN SPANISH SAHARA POLICY IS TO TURN THE OTHER CHEEK AND NOT RPT NOT TO RESPOND IN KIND.

5. AS DEPARTMENT HAS NOTED IN STATE 024935, USG IS PROPOSING INCREASE OF FMS CREDITS FOR FY 76 FROM \$5M TO \$15M. THIS IS IN DIRECT RESPONSE TO TUNISIAN EXPRESSION

OF CONCERNS RE LIBYAN-ALGERIAN THREAT AND REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL USG MILITARY ASSISTANCE. OUR LIMITED CAPACITY TO RESPOND HAS DISAPPOINTED TUNISIANS AT A TIME WHEN WE HAVE ALSO TERMINATED OUR MAP GRANT AID. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE CONSIDERED SYMPATHETICALLY GOT'S REQUEST TO BUY A SAM MISSILE SYSTEM, AS WELL AS INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT, WE HAVE INDIRECTLY DISCOURAGED GOT FROM BUYING THE HAWK SYSTEM THEY WANT. IN ANY CASE, THIS SYSTEM IS PROBABLY TOO EXPENSIVE FOR THEM, AND WE HAVE OFFERED THEM CHAPARRAL SYSTEM INSTEAD. GOT HAS DECIDED TO DEFER PURCHASE OF INTERCEPTOR AIRCRAFT, EVIDENTLY PRIMARILY FOR BUDGETARY REASONS BUT, ALSO, DOUBTLESS, BECAUSE MODERN AIRCRAFT CAN BE A DOUBLE-EDGED WEAPON IF THEY GET INTO THE HANDS OF DISSIDENT PILOTS.

6. AS THE DEPARTMENT HAS INDICATED, THE SIXTH FLEET CONTINUES TO VISIT TUNISIAN PORTS AT THE RATE OF 14-15 VISITS A YEAR. THE FLAGSHIP OF THE FLEET CALLS AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR AND DID SO LAST IN JULY 1975. A PRINCIPAL REASON WHY PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ATTACHES IMPORTANCE TO REGULAR VISITS OF THE SIXTH FLEET TO TUNISIA IS HIS FIRM BELIEF THAT SIXTH FLEET SERVES AS A "SHIELD" TO DETER AND PROTECT HIM FROM HIS ENEMIES. THERE HAVE BEEN INDICATIONS, THOUGH NOT RECENTLY, THAT QADHAFI BELIEVES THERE IS A SECRET TUNISIAN-AMERICAN AGREEMENT WHICH COMMITS THE USG TO DEFEND TUNISIA. THIS BELIEF, IF IT STILL EXISTS,

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PRESUMABLY HAS SOME DETERRENT VALUE ALTHOUGH USG SETBACKS IN VIETNAM AND ANGOLA MAY HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS CONCERNING USG CAPABILITY AND RESOLVE TO ACT IN SUPPORT OF ITS FRIENDS.

7. WHILE OBVIOUSLY THERE IS CONSIDERABLE DOUBT AS TO WHETHER USG WOULD INTERVENE MILITARILY ON TUNISIAN BEHALF IN EVENT OF ALGERIAN OR LIBYAN MILITARY ATTACK, WE CONSIDER IT IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE TO DEMONSTRATE OUR INTEREST IN TUNISIA'S POLITICAL, MILITARY AND ECONOMIC NEEDS. THIS PROVIDES IMPORTANT PSYCHOLOGICAL REASSURANCE TO TUNISIAN REGIME, WHICH GREATLY ESTEEMS ITS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. HOPEFULLY, OUR INVOLVEMENT HERE ALSO SERVES AS SOMETHING OF A DETERRENT TO TUNISIA'S POTENTIAL ENEMIES. FOR THIS REASON, WE ARE PLEASED AT PROSPECT THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO RESUME PL 480, TITLE I SHIPMENTS TO TUNISIA; THAT OUR FIRST FULL-FLEDGED JOINT COMMISSION MEETING LAST OCTOBER WAS FRUITFUL; THAT WE INTEND TO CONTINUE FMS CREDIT AT INCREASED LEVEL OVER COMING YEARS; AND THAT WE CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, ALBEIT AT MODEST LEVEL.

8. FUNDAMENTALLY, WE TEND TO AGREE WITH MINISTER BELKHODJA
THAT NATURE OF LIBYAN-ALGERIAN THREAT IS ESSENTIALLY
POLITICAL AND SUBVERSIVE RATHER THAN MILITARY. WHILE WE

THINK THAT GOT HAS GOOD REASON TO IMPROVE SOMEWHAT ITS
MILITARY POSTURE, MAIN FOCUS OF TUNISIAN ACTIVITY IN COPING
WITH OUTSIDE THREAT SHOULD BE, IN OUR VIEW, TO ACCELERATE
ITS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN TUNISIAN ECONOMY AND SOCIETY
WHILE AT SAME TIME ENHANCING ITS CAPABILITY TO FRUSTRATE
SUBVERSION MOUNTED AGAINST THE REGIME.
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